

DESULTORY SELECTIONS.

PASSAGES IN THE LIFE OF A TENOR-SINGER.

FARINELLI.

FARINELLI, the celebrated singer, whom Italy almost idolized at the period which gave birth to a legion of great musicians, was in England when he received from Elizabeth Farnese, queen of Spain, and wife of Philip V. an invitation to repair to Madrid. It was not an easy matter to escape from the testimonies of English admiration; never had an artist enjoyed in London a reputation equal to his. At a *soirée* in St. James' Palace he had sung before the king, accompanied by the Princess Royal, who became afterwards Princess of Orange, and had had the honor, very rare in those days, to be felicitated by the sovereign. The Prince of Wales, after a concert given in his apartments, presented the artist with a snuff-box set in brilliants, and containing a considerable sum; this example had been imitated by crowds of the nobility, and Farinelli was overwhelmed with magnificent presents. He hesitated for some time to quit a country where he passed his days so agreeably, but he had pledged himself to return to Italy, and as a royal invitation could not with decorum be resisted, he determined at last on setting out for Spain.

Farinelli, who had never been in Paris, sojourned there several months. Though the French at that period were profoundly ignorant of good music and the art of singing, he met with enthusiastic success. Louis XV. heard him in the queen's apartments, applauded him with a warmth which surprised the whole court, and sent him his portrait, enriched with diamonds, and a purse containing 500 louis d'or—an extraordinary mark of esteem from a prince who was known to have little taste for music in general, and least of all for that of the Italian school.

After having extricated himself from Parisian seductions with almost as much difficulty as from those of London, Farinelli crossed the Pyrenees. His journey was signalized by one of those adventures so common at that period in Spain, and which have become scarcely less so at the present. After a long day's march, at a little distance from the inn he was to sleep at, our singer was awakened from a profound doze by the sudden halt of the mules. The carriage was surrounded by a dozen scoundrels in rags, armed with carbines, who intimated to him in a tone which brooked no reply, the order to alight instantly. Temerity is no indispensable attribute of a great singer, so Farinelli

oeyed, and was seated some little distance looking on the carriage, which was minutely searched. He travelled not only with a considerable amount of gold, but also with a number of presents with which he had been rewarded by the courtiers of Versailles. This circumstance was favorable to him, for the banditti on regarding these splendid offerings were desirous of knowing whom they had the honor of robbing, and when they learnt that they were in presence of the renowned artist, their chief, who picked himself on being a connoisseur in music, requested Farinelli to sing a grand air. This he did, and though at first he was so overpowered by emotion that he could scarcely pitch his voice, yet at last necessity gave him force, and accidentally recollecting a pathetic air, he delivered it with so much sweetness and pathos, that the brigands, moved to tears, kissed his hands one after the other, and thanked him with effusion. The idea of plundering such a gifted mortal was discarded at once as unworthy of them, and retaining only a small sum in order not entirely to lose their time, the musical gang conducted him back to his carriage with many excuses for the inconvenience to which he had been subjected; thus was the adventure of Ariosto renewed. The remainder of the route offered no further obstacle, and Farinelli arrived at Madrid.

Farinelli had resolved on making but a short absence, and projected returning to London, where he had entered into engagements with the administrator of the Opera-house; but destiny decided otherwise, and the country he had merely intended to visit retained him upwards of four-and-twenty years. Philip V. had been long subject to fits of despondency, which absorbed all his faculties. Under the influence of one of these he had abdicated in favor of his son, Louis. Obligated, by the death of that prince, to re-assume the reins of government, he was still a prey to the same affliction. He passed whole months in bed, believing every instant his end was approaching, although he was suffering by no physical infirmity. State affairs of the greatest magnitude lay deferred in consequence of this mental alienation of the sovereign. The queen, endowed with a strong understanding, and anxious to re-establish the monarch's health, as soon as Farinelli's celebrity had reached Madrid, fancied she could render him subservient to her views.

Philip V. disgusted with every thing else, still remained sensible to the impressions of music. The queen, without proposing to call in Farinelli, arranged a chamber for a concert adjoining that which his majesty inhabited, and desired the artist to prelude with some airs of a soft and tender description. The voice of Farinelli possessed an irresistible charm. Scarcely had Philip heard the first accents when he struggled in vain to control his emotion. At the end of the first air he melted into tears; after the second, the great vocalist was, by his command, introduced, and after bestowing a thousand eulogiums on him, he called for a third *morceau*, in which Farinelli called up the magic of his talent. What the queen anticipated happened. The king's melancholy, which nothing before could assuage, gave way to the influence of the physical power of music. Left alone with the artist, to whom he was indebted for one of the greatest delights he had ever experienced, the king of Spain enjoined him to name any favor he might like best, and promised not to refuse it. Farinelli proved himself a wary politician, and assured his majesty he should consider himself abundantly recompensed if his sovereign would make some efforts and endeavor to rouse himself from that state of dejection into which he had fallen, and seek occupation in attending to the affairs of the kingdom. What neither the queen, nor the ministers, nor the physicians could effect, was accorded to a singer! Philip resolved on surmounting his malady, sent for his barber, which he had not done for months before, and attended the meetings of his council.

The queen, apprehensive that at the departure of Farinelli the king might relapse into his fatal melancholy, succeeded in fixing him at Madrid for the life of the monarch, with the condition that his talent should be reserved exclusively for the august patient. He was awarded 50,000 francs annually.

When Philip, assailed by the combined forces of England, France and Holland, was obliged to banish his minister, the famous Alberoni, in Italy, before being able to sign the peace, never favorite enjoyed more credit than Farinelli. During the ten years that he was in the service of Philip V. that is, until his death, he sung every evening four *morceaux*, which never lost their power of exciting to the highest degree their august hearer. This was the more extraordinary from the circumstance of the programme remaining invariably the same. Oftentimes did the artist, to whom these four *morceaux* had become odious, implore

permission to vary his repertory, but in vain, for Philip would sooner have made him a present of one of his provinces than consent. Two of the airs of the programme were from "Hasse"—"Pallido il Sol," and "Per questo dolce amplesso"—the third, a minuet, on which the artist had made variations *à l'improviste*. It is calculated that during Farinelli's ten years' function he sung each of these airs about 3,600 times.

Farinelli never requested any thing for himself, though he might have obtained any thing when his talent held the king under the empire of a sort of fascination.

Ferdinand VI. son and successor of Philip V. had, like his father, a tendency to melancholy. He resisted for some time having recourse to the same musical enchantment which had so powerfully acted on his predecessor, but the voice of Farinelli produced almost a similar effect, though this time he was allowed to vary his airs according to his own taste. By his counsels Ferdinand VI. built in his palace of Buen Retiro a magnificent theatre, to which the most skilful singers of Italy were invited. No expense was spared to render the representations sumptuous. Farinelli was the director; he never appeared on the stage, but he managed the company.

Farinelli was oftentimes entrusted under Ferdinand with diplomatic negotiations—it was reported he was made a Spanish minister, but he dreaded too much the fierce and jealous nobility with whom he was constantly in contact. The only public honor he attained was when Ferdinand was first restored to reason. The queen, after having obtained permission from the monarch, with her own hands invested the artist with the cross of Calatrava.

Farinelli was desirous of terminating his days in Spain, but destiny ordained it otherwise. Charles III. on ascending the throne aimed at a nearer alliance with France. This policy being opposed to that of his predecessor, he gave orders that Farinelli should quit the kingdom, but that his appointments should be regularly transmitted to him. Farinelli retired to Bologna, and remained there until his death, surrounded with the portraits of the sovereigns who had so long honored him with their confidence.

Rubini and Farinelli may be compared in more than one point. The one was considered the first singer in Europe of his age; the other enjoys the title of "Prince of Tenors," which even his rivals accord him. If Farinelli has had the honor of singing in the king of England's palace, accompanied by the princess of Orange, has not Rubini also been often admitted to take a part in the concerts of Queen Victoria and her illustrious husband? Has he not received as many presents and marks of distinction as the favorite of Philip V.? Farinelli, however, was a *quasi* minister—does Rubini aspire to this dignity likewise? After having been the arbitrator of the destinies of the first theatres in the world, after having been chief of the universal vocal monarchy, is he likely to become, like the minister-chanteur of Philip V. and Ferdinand VI. the negotiator of the political interests of the Peninsula? This does not appear probable. He has an equally noble part to play. Let him sing often in the presence of the members of government in Madrid; and after having heard the soothing melodies of Bellini, whose accents, full of tenderness, find an echo in every bosom where the sensitive fibre is not completely inert, these political chiefs will understand that the sanguinary executions of which Spain has just been the theatre, are unworthy of a civilized people.